

Russian River Action Plan



**2nd Edition
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SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THIS REPORT

In October 1996, the National Marine Fisheries Service listed coho salmon in the Russian River as “threatened” under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). While this classification was a significant step toward recognition of the declining salmonid populations in the Russian River watershed, activities had been under way for some time to develop a coordinated effort to protect and restore the watershed’s fisheries. As part of these efforts, in March 1997 the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) published the first edition of the *Russian River Action Plan*. The Plan provided a detailed listing of actions needed to protect listed fish species, and identified opportunities to coordinate and cooperate with federal, state and local agencies to gain federal and/or state funding for projects.

Following the publication of the first edition of the *Russian River Action Plan*, two additional salmonid species were added to the list of “threatened” species under the ESA: steelhead in August 1997 and Chinook salmon in September 1999. These listings further increased attention and interest in restoration activities in the Russian River watershed, while complicating SCWA’s water supply, flood control and sanitation responsibilities.

While a number of interrelated factors have affected the abundance of the salmonid populations in the Russian River, it has become increasingly apparent that restoration efforts that are scientifically grounded and adequately funded are imperative for the survival of these species and must commence immediately. Some projects to restore fisheries habitat and improve water quality already have been completed and are contributing to the salmonids’ survival. However, much of the Russian River watershed’s riparian habitat awaits restoration and critical spawning grounds within the watershed remain inaccessible. Efforts to establish a scientific framework for restoration activities must be coordinated with stakeholders in the region, and will require the expertise of fisheries biologists, land-use planners, natural resource managers, hydrologists and many others.

In an effort to again summarize the restoration needs within the watershed and identify opportunities for cooperation among federal, state and local agencies, and private property owners, SCWA has prepared this second edition of the *Russian River Action Plan*. The projects identified within this Plan, while in no way an exhaustive list of restoration activities within the watershed, represent the breadth and depth of activities required to improve conditions and reverse population declines of salmonids within the Russian River watershed. *Any project within this document that receives funding or is considered for funding is subject to environmental review and public noticing requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and/or the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).*

THE NEED FOR STATE AND FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

The decline of salmonid species within the Russian River watershed has posed difficult challenges for local communities. The new regulatory requirements resulting from the listing of these species have affected diverse sectors of the economy, including private and public land management, forestry, agriculture, fishing, recreation, power production, water supply and waste management. Constraints on water resources and land use could place extreme burdens on public and private projects, affecting economic vitality within the region. At the same time, the cost of recovery efforts to save historic runs of salmon and steelhead also threatens to overwhelm the financial resources available at the local level. This is why state and federal assistance to save the salmon is so critical.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED

The Russian River originates in central Mendocino County north of the city of Ukiah, and flows into the Pacific Ocean at Jenner, about 20 miles west of the city of Santa Rosa. The main channel of the Russian River is approximately 110 miles long, and drains a watershed area of about 1,485 square miles.

There are two large lakes in the Russian River watershed: Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma. Lake Mendocino, impounded by Coyote Valley Dam, is located on the east fork of the Russian River. The lake began storing water in 1959, has a capacity of 118,900 acre-feet and captures a drainage area of about 105 square miles. Lake Sonoma is impounded by Warm Springs Dam at the confluence of Warm Springs Creek and Dry Creek, about 14 miles northwest of the city of Healdsburg. Lake Sonoma began storing water in 1982, has a capacity of 381,000 acre-feet and captures a drainage area of about 130 square miles.

The Russian River watershed is primarily an agricultural area with the greatest emphasis on vineyard and orchard crops. Major orchard crops include prunes, pears and apples, while other crops such as cherries and walnuts are also

produced. Besides agriculture, there is a growing trend toward light industry and commercial development, and a significant telecommunications industry within the region. The production and processing of timber, agricultural and animal products; gravel removal and processing; energy production; and miscellaneous light manufacturing operations are additional industrial activities in the watershed. The Russian River watershed also has developed an international reputation for the production of premium wines, contributing to a strong tourism industry within the region.



Riparian habitat along the Russian River

WATERSHED MAP

BACK OF WATERSHED MAP

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BA	Biological Assessment
BO	Biological Opinion
CDFG	California Department of Fish and Game
CDOT	California Department of Transportation
CODAR	Coastal Radar
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FEP	Fisheries Enhancement Program
GIS	Geographic Information System
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
KRIS	Klamath River Information System
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCRWQCB	California Regional Water Quality Control Board, North Coast Region
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
OCSD	Occidental County Sanitation District
Prop 13	Costa-Machado Water Act of 2000 (Proposition 13)
RCD	Resource Conservation District
RIIS	Russian River Interactive Information System
SCWA	Sonoma County Water Agency
SFRWQCB	California Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Francisco Bay Region
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture